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CLUSTERING VISITORS TO A RELIGIOUS ISLAND: THE CASE OF TINOS

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Tourists visiting religious destinations are usually influenced by religious motivations. However, this might not be the case for all tourists, since visitors to religious sites may visit a destination not only for pilgrimage, but also to satisfy various needs interlinked with social, cultural and recreational factors. This paper attempts to investigate the motivations and activities of tourists visiting Tinos, a Greek island known as a religious destination for Christian Orthodox, by undertaking a clustering approach. A self-administrated questionnaire was distributed to 97 visitors of Tinos during the summer of 2007. From the findings it is evident that although the island is considered as one of the main religious sites for Christian Orthodox, tourists are not a homogenous group. Instead, the analytical approach adopted produced three segments, namely the “cultural tourists”, the “vacationers” and the “religious tourists”.

Introduction

Religiously motivated travel to sacred places is perhaps the oldest and most prevalent type of travel in human history (Jackowski and Smith, 1992; Rinschede, 1992). Although some scholars may dispute Brodsky-Porges (1981:54) claim that “even to this present era, religion is among the most influential of motivators”, the influence of religion on tourist movements is still undeniable and very great. Depending on the degree of their religious belief, people travel to sacred places searching for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine, to satisfy their spiritual or material needs (Vuconic, 1996). Tinos, which is located in the Cyclades group of islands in Greece, forms a sacred site for Christian Orthodox because of the Church of the Madonna of the Annunciation (Evangelistria) and its miraculous healing icon (Terzidou et al, 2008).

The Church of Annunciation is besieged annually by large numbers of visitors who seek blessing and forgiveness (Dubisch, 1995). It is a pilgrimage site that attracts visitors who are either members of religious

tour groups or consider themselves to be pilgrims. For this reason, although tourism to Tinos has increased, it is still overwhelmed by the pilgrimage of the Orthodox. In this respect, Tinos differs greatly from other islands of the Cyclades, where the predominant model of tourism is based almost entirely on the attractions of climate and beaches, directly related to mass tourism (Dubisch, 1995).

Bearing in mind the diversity of the island as far as the type of its visitors is concerned, the current study was undertaken aiming to identify the motivations and activities of tourists visiting Tinos and to classify them in relation to their sociodemographic and trip characteristics, as well as their activities while on the island.

1. Theoretical Overview on Motivations for Religious Tourism

Much research on religious tourism has been focused on what motivates tourists to undertake religious travels to sacred sites (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). The religious motives literature was initiated primarily by Lickorish and Kershaw (1958) who argued that the decision of religious tourists to visit a destination is initiated by forces beyond their control often based on sentiment of great personal interest, or family ties. According to Turner and Turner (1973) travelers expect a spiritual experience and a chance to meet with other travellers in a classless society called *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1978). Cohen (1992) maintains that the “pilgrim” and the “pilgrim-tourist” peregrinate toward their sociocultural centre, while the “traveler” and the “traveler–tourist” travel from it toward the periphery. Tourists and pilgrims are similar, if not one and the same, for “even when the role[s] of tourist and pilgrim are combined, they are necessarily different but form a continuum of inseparable elements (Graburn, 1983:16)”. Sousa (1993) argues that people can switch from being a pilgrim to a tourist without the individual being aware of the change from one to the other. Smith (1992) identifies tourists and pilgrims as two distinct actors situated at opposite ends on a continuum of travel. Often a journey to sacred sites may have several motivations, interests and other subordinate goals some of which have nothing to do with religion directly, but are closely connected with holiday making and with journeys undertaken for social, cultural or political reasons (Andriotis, 2009; Nolan and Nolan 1992; Rinschede, 1992). Many people travel to a widening variety of sacred sites not only for religious or spiritual purposes or to have an experience with the sacred in the traditional sense, but also because they are marked and marketed as heritage or cultural attractions to be consumed (Timothy and Boyd 2003). Based on this, it can be concluded that religious tourism refers not only to

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the form of tourism with strong or single-minded religious motivation of pilgrimage, but also to those non-pilgrimage tourist activities, such as travelling to the religious sites for sightseeing, cultivation and recreation (Mu et al, 2007).

2. Methodological Approach

Data for this study were collected through a self-administrated questionnaire distributed to 200 visitors of Tinos during August 2007. A total of 97 questionnaires were collected, yielding to a 48.5 percent response rate. Respondents were approached face-to-face at the courtyard of the Madonna's Church of the Annunciation, the Christian Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as the shopping centre of the capital of the island Chora.

The questionnaire was prepared following a review of the literature dealing with religious tourists and pilgrims motivations and activities (e.g. Pusztai, 2004; Rinschede, 1992 etc.). The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions: 5 questions concerning the trip characteristics (first-time or repeat visit, number of visits, length of stay, companion on the visit and source of information); 6 sociodemographic (nationality, gender, age, family status, education and employment status); and 7 Likert scale questions ranging from very positive to very negative where respondents were asked to indicate their motivations and activities. .

Data analysis was conducted via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 15.0). The sample was divided into subgroups using cluster analysis. The *K*-means cluster procedure was used because it was more appropriate for the sample size. In a *K*-means analysis, the number of clusters is chosen by the researcher and cases are grouped into the cluster with the closest centre (Andriotis, 2003). Once clusters had been chosen, their key characteristics were examined and they were named by comparing the mean scores of the responses and the ratings on the Likert scale for each question. To pinpoint differences in data composition and further identify the profile of the three clusters, Cramer's V and ANOVA tests were carried out. The level of probability for rejecting the null hypothesis that the independent and dependent variables were not related was .05 for all tests.

3. Results

The clustering procedure was based on the mean average scores of the 7 Likert scale statements. This procedure resulted in three clusters. The study

findings indicate that nearly all the members of the three clusters visiting the island are domestic visitors and “as such they are part of the island’s identity (Terzidou et al, 2008:124)”.

Cluster 1: Cultural Tourists. The first cluster represents 29.9 percent of the sample ($n= 29$). This cluster is characterized as seeking cultural experiences and therefore was labelled cultural tourists. The members of this cluster travel to Tinos because they are interested in visiting specific religious and cultural attractions, such as religious sites, including the Church of the Annunciation, archaeological and historical monuments, and traditional villages, having contact with local culture, architecture and environment in combination with recreation and relaxation. However, this particular cluster may combine tourism with pilgrimage or fulfilment of a vow.

Among cultural tourists 69 percent were women of an age group 36-50 (41.4%), followed by 38 percent in the age group 17-35, married with children (41.4%) or single (31%) and travelling mainly with companion (44.8%), while the majority of them consulted friends and relatives before visiting the island (58.6%). Cultural tourists can be characterized as having high levels of educational attainment (72.4%), while regarding employment 52 percent were employed in a service/public service/organisation/manual trade or retailing/wholesaling and 24 percent were freelancers.

The members of this cluster were motivated to visit Tinos due to its unique culture, local tradition and natural resources, combined with relaxation and entertainment, and are repeated visitors where they had experienced a satisfying experience. Hence, this cluster verifies the finding of a study undertaken by ATLAS (Richards, 1996) which found that culturally motivated tourists tend to be highly educated, more influenced by cultural attractions in their choice of destination and far more likely to make multiple cultural attraction visits during their stay than other visitors.

Cluster 2: Vacationers. The second cluster is the smallest, comprising 25.8 percent of the total sample ($n= 25$). The members of this cluster travel to Tinos for the primary purpose of summer vacations and therefore were labelled vacationers. They search for relaxation, pleasure and contact with nature while, their activities include swimming, taking excursions to the villages and nearby islands, amusement and night life. Conversely, for this cluster religious sites and cultural attractions are not their main motivations to visit Tinos.

The majority of the visitors were women (64%), and they belonged in the 36-54 age group (56%), followed by 32 percent in the age group 17-35, married with children (48%) or single (45.5%). Based on the data, 56 percent were well educated having achieved the highest level of education, while 44 percent had finished the high school. Fifty six percent of them were employed in a service/public service/organisation, and 16 percent listed their jobs as

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managerial/administrative, while 16 percent were students. Forty four percent of *vacationers* stayed for 3-5 days and 32 percent spent more than 6 days on the island.

Tinos has been chosen for family holidays, since 40 percent of the visitors travelled with their families when at the same time it was the preferable destination for 32 percent of young travellers who linked their stay with sea and sun holidays, nightlife and pleasure. During their stay on the island, the members of this cluster expressed their positive opinion regarding the particular destination, given that most of them (96%) expressed a desire to visit Tinos again, in the future.

Cluster 3: Religious Tourists. The third cluster represents the largest segment of the sample, comprising 44.3 percent of the total ($n=43$). This cluster undertakes a journey to Tinos for pilgrimage or fulfillment of a vow, visiting mainly the Holy Church of Annunciation and other sacred shrines and performing various religious rituals. In addition, visitors may combine pilgrimage with sightseeing religious sites which are famous for architecture, art or historical associations. Moreover, they may participate in religious festivals and cultural events associated with shrines on important festival days (August 15, Easter, etc.). For the reasons given above, the member of this cluster were labelled religious tourists.

Data analysis for this cluster revealed strong female predominance (74.4%) of women. Among Orthodox Christians, it is most common for women to represent and connect their families to the spiritual world (Dubisch, 1995). It is a group of mostly elderly people as 56 percent were over 51 years old, married with children (51.2%) or widowed and divorced (19%), while the majority of them were of secondary education (51.2%), employed or retired (41.9% and 16.3% respectively). For this cluster, most information search involved consulting with friends and relatives (48.8%) and taking part in religious group tours organized mainly by Christian parishes or church organizations (34.9%). Fifty eight percent of members of this cluster stayed for one or two days while thirty five percent spent three to five days on the island.

From the above-mentioned, it can be concluded that the members of this cluster are mainly pilgrims whose principal motive for visiting Tinos is to invoke Madonna's aid, to make a vow or to improve their chances of salvation and to seek the fulfillment of the spiritual and religious needs and aspirations. However, Tinos does not only attracts visitors with strong or single-minded religious motivation of pilgrimage, but also, religiously motivated tourists focused on religious culture who visit religious sites, and take part in religious festivals, for sightseeing, cultivation and recreation, or "simply for seeing a famous holy place (Dubisch, 1995:94)". Furthermore, this cluster seems to

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visit other travel destinations of religious interest (88.4%), either as pilgrims seeking the divine and the holy or as tourists searching for authentic experience through religious culture. Finally, the vast majority of the group (97.6%) wishes to repeat their journey to Tinos, probably as pilgrims or tourists.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the motivations and activities of tourists on the Greek island of Tinos which forms the sacred centre for Christian Orthodox because of the Church of the Annunciation and Madonna's holy icon. The results of the study indicated the potential for the development of organised religious tourism, while the findings of the research showed considerable copresence of religious tourists interested in combining pilgrimage with visiting religious attractions being surveyed as monuments of architectural or historical importance and pilgrims stimulated mainly by pilgrimage motives. At the same time, the research indicated an increased number of tourists that tend to visit cultural attractions along with holiday making, while a number of visitors travel to the island for vacations, relaxation and amusement. Finally, it is clear that tourists visit Tinos individually and stay only for a limited number of days. The findings of the research suggest that in order to attract specific market segments (Eastern Christian Orthodox of Europe and Diaspora) in Tinos, regional and local tourist authorities as well as managers of religious attractions of Tinos need to be partnered with tour operators specialized in religious tourism. Moreover, emphasis should be placed on cooperation between religious tourism and other forms of special-interest tourism (hiking, climbing etc.) in an attempt to extend the length of stay. Finally, the creation of a plan is essential for the development of conference tourism linked to religion in order Tinos to become a year-round destination. To conclude, this research was subject to several limitations, such as limited time and refusal of a significant number of visitors to participate in the study. Future research is required to investigate the perceptions of other stakeholders involved in the development of religious tourism, e.g. travel agencies, hotel and restaurant owners and/or managers.

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